

Energy policy will enhance Florida environment, economy

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Florida is at a critical crossroads in terms of energy. We have one of the highest populations in the country, and every day more than 1,200 new people call Florida home. As a peninsular state with a high coastal population, we have reason to be concerned about the effects climate change could have on our environment and our economy.

The Florida Energy Commission is working to expedite a state climate-action plan tailored to Florida's unique population and environment. This plan will be a part of the first set of annual recommendations the FEC makes to the Legislature by Dec. 31. Once submitted to lawmakers, these recommendations will be poised to become the official energy policy of Florida.

The 22 other states that have adopted plans that comprehensively address climate change and energy use have found that the steps they are taking are likely to result in positive long-term economic advantages. It is possible to create an energy policy that energy consumers can afford, and that will be profitable for energy suppliers. Florida doesn't have to choose between a green energy policy and a green economy.

A comprehensive energy plan could bring out-of-state dollars into Florida, promote energy cost savings, and increase state revenue by attracting clean and renewable energy industries to Florida.

Energy independence is another thing Florida stands to gain, gradually, by going green. More of the dollars we now spend on foreign oil could instead be funneled into Florida's economy, and back into Floridians' pockets.

Our goal is to make sure that when someone in Florida flips on a light switch 50 years from now, the light will come on, and that the power generating that light will be reliable, affordable and efficient.

Florida deserves an energy policy that will keep the power on, rain or shine. But the FEC cannot succeed without public participation. We are charged to provide recommendations to the Legislature to guide it in choosing the best practices and options for Florida's energy future by Dec. 31. Therefore, we strive to make our meetings accessible to more people by convening in different locations.

The FEC will meet May 11 at the Florida Solar Energy Center in Cocoa. I sincerely hope that citizens in the Central Florida region feel strongly about shaping Florida's future. There's nothing more patriotic Floridians can do than to help secure our future.

Tommy Boroughs is chair of the Florida Energy Commission. For additional meeting information, visit the commission's Web site, www.floridaenergycommission.gov or e-mail info@floridaenergycommission.gov.